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Exhibiting Affiliation with Disabled Children in Diverse Social Development Situations

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Abstract

The results of empirical research of distinctive features of disabled children affiliation depending on the specificity of the social environment are given in the article. Affiliation is considered to be a condition of social adaptation and integration of disabled children into the society. Methodological approaches to some aspects of the problem in works of L.S. Vygotsky, M. Cole, A.V. Suvorov have been examined. The description of affiliation as a personality trait with cultural background is given. It was found out that disabled children are aimed at socializing although they have serious difficulties when communicating with social environment. The material on nonparticipant observation revealing certain traits of disabled children behavior under various surroundings is of great importance. Research data for further studying the topic of the article are given.

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1. Introduction to the problem

The importance of the problem of disabled children's social adaptation and integration in the society is connected with the growing number of children with deficiencies. Experts of UNO and WHO have an opinion that people with limited health and social functions account for 10% of world population including 120 m. children and adolescents.

The problem of disabled children's integration in the society in Russia had been stated before the notion of an 'invalid child' was introduced (1980) in works of L.S. Vygotsky, S. Ya. Rubinstein, A.R. Luria and others [1, 2]. Rehabilitation issues of the handicapped were also studied in the papers of O.S. Andreeva, D.I. Lavrov, S.N. Puzin and others [3].

L.S. Vygotsky – the founder of defectology in Russia – in his monograph "A Tool and a Sign in Child's Development" writes that a child enters into collaboration while socializing practical thinking by sharing his/her activity with another person. His/her own activity that has an aim gives an opportunity to imagine, plan his/her future action [4, p. 42]. L.S. Vygotsky's understanding of development is "the process characterized by the unity of material and mental aspects. In this process there appears a "social development situation" as a peculiar and unique relationship between a child and his social reality. It is this factor of social reality that is the main source of a child's personality development [5, p. 903].

In the process of physically challenged child's integration it is important to take into consideration that this child is brought to the special system of relations after the disease has been diagnosed. Parents and surrounding people long for curing him/her and alleviate suffering. As a result a child turns out to be in a situation when he/she is always unable, is barred to do something. In order not to deprive a child of the chance to become a subject of his/her own life it is important to change this system of relationships using all cultural resources available. When seizing cultural means, a person changes his/her behavior. Understanding these changes, according to L.S. Vygotsky, results in the opportunity of self-development [6, p. 9].

American scholar M. Cole considered artefacts as culture foundations. An artefact is an aspect of the material world changing in the course of history and its embodiment in the purposeful person's action. Thus, the activity of the previous generations is accumulated in the present as a specific human constituent of the environment. Social world influences not only through actions of real people who communicate, show the example, persuade but also through invisible actions and objects created by people in the surrounding world of the individual. Those forms of social interaction are customs, scenarios, games, rituals, cultural forms and also artificial objects saturating the world with human intellect such as words, maps, television sets, Internet-sites. Artefacts are simultaneously ideal and material [7, p. 14].

It is of great importance to investigate what internal resources a disabled child possesses and who is to be integrated in society and to build relationships with people outside in the best way using cultural forms.

According to A.V. Suvorov [8] personality rehabilitation coincides with the process of formation of the personality and it has the following stages: 1) perception of his/her dissimilitude with the others; 2) perception that all those around are well-disposed to and ready to take part in solving problems; 3) return readiness to the similar well-disposed attitude to the people around, attempts to implement it in his/her own behavior; 4) active and deliberate help to himself/herself and constant readiness to help others, using his/her unique situation for personal and creative growth of one's own and that of other people (this is the highest stage of social integration, becoming deliberate personal self-rehabilitation) [9].

The person's internal condition, a significant requirement affecting the process of communication is affiliation. Affiliation is a property of a personality which is revealed in the will to be among other people, in the aspiration to establish warm, emotionally significant relationship with other people [10, 11]. An individual with this necessity sees one of the main meanings of life in human relationships [12, 13]. The influence of the environment on affiliation is well evident with the children up to 15 years of age [14]. Establishing this necessity is dependent upon the type of relationships with parents in the early childhood, with peers and can

break because of troublesome situations, diffidence which results in the feeling of loneliness and helplessness. At the same time, the company of other people allows to check the selected mode of behavior and reactions in difficult and dangerous situations. In some degree the closeness of the people results in the decrease in anxiety, mitigates the consequences of physiological and psychological stress. Such interaction can be called an ideal way of relationships when the best human traits are seen in the real life situation [15].

2. Research Methods Description

The object of the research is developing affiliation with disabled children in diverse social situations. The subject of the research is affiliation as a personality trait to be an instrument of disabled children's social adaptation and integration into the society. The hypothesis of the research is that development of affiliation of disabled children in various conditions will contribute to social adaptation and integration into the society.

The research consisted of two parts. The first part was aimed at studying affiliation intervened by the virtual communication milieu. To find out the degree of disabled children's involvement in the Internet the survey of 13 questions was conducted. The questions were to help to find out the most relevant field of the virtual environment for physically challenged children and the role of internet communication in their life.

The second part of the research was conducted using case-study method. This method is aimed at investigating a concrete situation or event of the real life. The cases were selected on the basis of nonparticipant observation of the disabled children in diverse situations (a workout room, specialized educational institution, home environment). Since a small enough sampling was performed (5 people) the quantitative data processing was not done. Besides, qualitative analysis based on the case-study of each child, allows us to reveal the distinctive features of affiliation in various conditions in more detail. The particular attention was paid to the following components of affiliation: necessity in communication, communication itself and confidence when communicating.

3. Sampling Characteristics

The empirical base was composed of 105 people. All test subjects were patients of the federal clinical institution Chief Bureau of Medical and Social Expertise for the Republic of Mariy El. 100 people aged 12-16 were surveyed in the first part of the investigation. The test subjects were disabled children with various diseases. The sampling was composed of 79 girls (75%) and 26 boys (25%).

4. Results

The result of the first part of the research is the data obtained through the survey. The majority of the respondents (85%) think that the main thing in life of each person is the possibility to exchange information and experience with other people. The question "Do you feel the lack of communication?" was answered positively by 60% and negatively by 40%. In general, the respondents consider establishing warm friendly relationships with other people to be important (85%), however only 40% were confident answering that they had many friends. The respondents agree with the statement that warm friendly relationships in the family contribute to health improvement of the sick person (69% answered 'yes' and 24% answered 'likely yes'). The majority of the respondents (80%) claim that present-day means of communication (social networks, specialized sites, forums, email) help to overcome the feeling of loneliness, at the same time 43% use the Internet environment to search for useful information, advice and consultation of experts, 29% use it to expand the range of friends and social contacts and 14% use it to be supported in difficult situations from those who know them from their own experience. Besides, 80% of the respondents think that means of communication will contribute to integration of the handicapped into the society and almost all remarked that it was necessary to arrange meetings of the

disabled children, set up amateur clubs. Only 5% of the handicapped are the members of such clubs, although 85% said that attending the amateur clubs would contribute to experience exchange and useful information search.

All the children surveyed are logged in the social networks (100%). The majority of the respondents spend there in average 1-2 hours a day. The aims of the physically challenged children networking are: communication with the friends who they see seldom, expansion the range of acquaintances, making new contacts. The majority of the respondents (75%) think that social networks are necessary for the handicapped since they do not have any opportunity of barrier free communication. The conclusion can be made that the Internet environment is a favorable condition for integration and adaptation of disabled children into the society.

The opinion of the respondents what concerns the quality of the relationship with the social environment differed (Table 1).

The answers prove the fact that the majority of the respondents consider affiliation to be the way to reduce proneness to conflict and harmonize the relationships.

The other condition of development is educational, cultural, sport, etc. environment. The results of the second part of the research is the material of the nonparticipant observation covering development of affiliation in concrete conditions.

Case 1. Place: workout room. Description: a youth, 18 years old, diagnosis – deaf-dumbness. It is seen that the youth is well integrated into the society. Although, in general, his behavior can be called detached, he behaves independently and at the same time he is contacting the other young men. It should be mentioned that he effects communication with the other participants as he shakes hands, greets and says goodbye. Using finger-speech he speaks with lips and explains what he needs. In general he feels confident since he probably regularly attends the workout room. He knows the place and where the equipment is.

Case 2. Place: workout room. Description: a teenager, 15 years old, diagnosis - ICP. The child is willing to communicate, which is seen in his wish to establish contacts with other people (predominantly with older ones). His need in joint action is seen indirectly in his appearance: he comes up to the mirror from time to time, looks at himself, at his body. He is active in communication: greets and says goodbye to every attendee. He feels confident in the workout room.

Case 3. Place: workout room. Description: a girl, 10 years old, blind. Her will to communicate was not observed. Although it was seen that the girl listens to the outside sounds but she was not in contact with anyone present. She only contacted the coach who helped her after the training to go upstairs where she was awaited by the relatives. Nevertheless, the girl feels confident in the workout room, she moves not being accompanied by anyone.

Case 4. Place: specialized school for deaf and acoustically challenged children. Description: a girl, 14 years old, diagnosis - deaf-dumbness. The girl is willing to communicate. She is open, curious and sociable. The communication is effected with finger-speech, saying with lips. She feels confident. She speaks about herself with great relish, teaching finger-speech to younger children.

Case 5. Place: home environment. Description: a youth, 16 years old, diagnosis – abnormal development, underdevelopment of extremities. Due to his disease he is unable to sit, he lies all the time. Next to him is a wheelchair which is used by him for moving. There is a switched on TV set next to him. He holds a remote control transmitter in one hand and a telephone in the other one. The laptop is also close by. There hang letters of acknowledgement, diplomas, child handcrafted items, pieced jigsaw puzzles. While talking to him it is evident that he likes singing very much and he is very good at it. His speech is well-bred.

5. Discussion

The results of the empirical research obtained confirm the supposition that distinctive features of disabled children affiliation depend on the condition of the environment. The conditions of the real social environment unlike the virtual one offer other ways of communication of the handicapped with the people surrounding them. Consequently, the behavior of disabled children differs depending on the conditions. Affiliation is seen in a different way since in real life conditions, aspiration to communicate is accompanied by the ability to communicate and confidence in behavior. This confirms the idea of L.S. Vygotsky on the unique character of the social situation of development as a unique relationship of a child with people and conditions around. The aspiration of children to use their situation connected with limited opportunities for personal growth proves the realism of A.V. Suvorov's idea of the highest stage of social rehabilitation.

6. Conclusion

The results of the research allow us to conclude that in real life disabled children are rarely seen outside, they are seen more often in a specialized institutions or in amateur clubs. Some children become integrated in society with their parents' help, they are interested in their development and they have some accomplishments. The children are eager to contact, they are curious and sociable. Despite absence of finger-speech knowledge it is easy to understand a deaf and dumb children. They easily repeat what the interlocutor failed to understand. In contrast to their healthy peers they are less capricious, more open and ready to contact. The activity of these children is more purposeful. These facts offer the opportunity to make further researching of the optimum ways of disabled children development. Affiliation as a resource of personality adaptation in diverse social conditions requires further investigation.

Table 1. Disabled children's responses, %

Do you have many friends?	
a) yes	40
b) more likely yes than no	20
c) more likely no than yes	20
d) no answer	20
What can establishing warm friendly relationships result in? What is opinion?	
a) reducing proneness to conflict in the society	32
b) increase in the number of social contacts, new acquaintances	4
c) solving global present-day problems (criminality, alcoholism, drug-addiction, etc)	17
d) harmonization of relationships between people, feeling satisfaction	35
e) reduction of the number of lone people	12
In what case can forums, social networks be positive?	
a) rendering support in a difficult life situation by those who have experience similar problems	14
b) search of useful information, experts' advice and consultations	43
c) search of new friends, increase in social contacts	29
d) other	14

Can social networks, forums replace real communication for a disabled person?

a) yes	32
b) more likely yes than no	35
c) more likely no than yes	33

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